

# articles

## **University Students' Preferences of Assessing Levels of *Intelligibility* and *Comprehensibility* of Native English Teachers' (NETs) Accents Compared to Non-native English Teachers' (NNETs) Accents: A Case-Study with Undergraduate Students at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (HCU), Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates students' preferences regarding perceived levels of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* of various English accents, and also students' preferences regarding the accents they would like to use in their future communication in English. The findings suggest that from students' perspectives, the accents of native English teachers (NETs) were both more *intelligible* and *comprehensible* than the accents of non-native English teachers (NNETs). The findings strongly suggest that the majority of the participants expressed preference for native speaker (NS) accents as their

desired future models of use in terms of oral production. The findings also revealed that the issue of *familiarity* or *exposure* to those particular accents was extremely important in terms of determining their preferences for accents, both in terms of input and output. These preferences were largely shaped by a prevailing sociological construct or bias in favour of NS models, as the desired accent models for Thai learners of English, a construct which largely dominates the theory and practice of teaching and assessing pronunciation. The suggestions are that students need to be informed and introduced to a variety of accents of English, both various NS and non-native speaker (NNS) accents, as students' future interlocutors will include large numbers of both, especially in an intercultural and international setting, such as Thailand.

**Keywords:** accent, comprehensibility, familiarity, intelligibility, native English teacher, non-native English teacher, preferences

## Introduction

This study seeks to pursue two main objectives and tries to add value to the body of work on the NS-NNS dichotomy. In particular, this aims to explore Thai university students' preferences when accent is concerned in learning English with a NET or a NNET.

The differences between native English teachers (NETs) and non-native English teachers (NNETs) have been documented and highlighted in numerous studies concerned with the practice of English language teaching (ELT) which shed a light on the role learners' preferences play in defining the ideal teacher with a particular reference to the study of accent. Students' preferences could provide insights as to how pronunciation should be both taught and assessed in various international and inter-cultural settings, including Thailand.

In the process of listening comprehension, meaning is often negotiated depending on whether an accent is intelligible and comprehensible enough for the interlocutor. Perceived levels of intelligibility and comprehensibility might also have an effect on a later stage on the interlocutor or listener's decision to mimic, copy and use such accent in their future communication in English, especially for the purposes of international and intercultural communication.

In determining the degree of comprehension, Smith (1992, 2009) proposed a three-dimensional approach to assessing one's English speech in intercultural settings. The first level is *intelligibility*, which measures the listener's ability to identify and recognize words or utterances. The second level is *comprehensibility* which measures the listener's ability to understand the meanings of words or utterances in their given context (Natiladdanon & Thanavisuth, 2014, p. 18).

## Literature Review

Before examining the differences between NETs and NNETs as perceived by the students, it is important to mention how NETs and NNETs have been described and portrayed within the mainstream literature. For quite a while, the ELT profession has been shaped by the concept known as native-speakerism. Native-speakerism is an ideological and sociological construct which underpins the world of ELT in many different ways and affects in daily practices, such as, the professional, ideological, socio-cultural and political domains (Holliday, 2006; Suwanarak, 2010).

According to Holliday (2006, p. 385), this is an ideology largely underpinning the world of ELT, in which the NS is the ideal language

teacher. This ideology does not only concern the methodology of teaching the language, but it also impacts on professional discourse, such as hiring policies and practices, as well, the emergence of a certain bias or prejudice that NSs are superior to their non-native counterparts and are, therefore, the target model for English language learners in many parts of the world.

These sociological constructs and policies reflecting the ideology of native-speakerism have also largely affected the methodology of ELT in Thailand. Thus, depending on teachers' nationalities and language backgrounds, they have been assigned different teaching roles and different courses to teach, especially within a Thai university setting: listening and speaking or reading and writing. Thus, it has been decided by the Ministry of Education that only NETs would be allowed to teach listening and speaking courses, as they are suitable models for students to improve their levels of English proficiency and communicative skills (Suwanarak, 2010, pp. 44-45).

However, these practices have been continuously challenged by examining students' perceptions on this matter and, in particular, examining students' perceptions as to whether only NETs could be regarded as the appropriate teachers to teach listening and speaking courses in a Thai university setting, including the teaching of pronunciation. Students' accent preferences have thus been examined as to find out whether there might have been a certain degree of bias that NETs indeed are the ideal teachers of oral English classes in a Thai university setting (Goldsmith & Dennis, 2016; Jindapitak, 2014; Kalra & Thanavisuth 2018).

In this regard, it was found that in Thailand, indeed there is a certain myth or bias that the NS model is the one that learners should learn and imitate, especially when it comes to pronunciation learning. For example, Jindapitak (2014, p. 4983) found that from students' perspectives, when it comes to pronunciation teaching and learning, NS norms were the target model for university language learners and this ideological construct has affected daily ELT policies in Thailand to a large extent. In a similar study conducted in Thailand, Jindapitak and Teo (2013, p. 201) found that, from students' perspectives, NS accents were again chosen as the desired models and standards for learning and usage in a local, Thai context.

In addition, investigating Thai, undergraduate university students' perceptions of the strengths of NETs as compared to Thai English teachers (TETs), Goldsmith and Dennis (2016, p. 51) found that NETs were perceived as better teachers of listening and speaking, who also particularly were considered better and desired models in terms of pronunciation learning as they had "an accurate English accent".

In a similar study conducted with Thai, undergraduate university students in Thailand, Kalra and Thanavisuth (2018, p. 281) established that participants still placed more value on NS accents over NNS accents. Investigating Thai university students' perceptions towards World Englishes participants' perspectives, British and American English were still "better" versions of English. However, Thai English was perceived by participants as "undesirable".

Nevertheless, some other studies suggest that NNETs could also be good oral teachers in their own right, including teaching pronunciation (Rattanaphumma, 2013; Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014). Moreover, TETs,

in particular, possess a series of abilities, as some studies suggest. In this regard, Rattanaphumma (2013, p. 458) conducted a study trying to examine the attitudes of 348 English language learners towards both NETs' and NNETs' English accents. With reference to the area of English accents, it was found that learners held positive attitudes towards both NETs and NNETs. On the one hand, respondents perceived NS accents as “authentic, proper and classical”. On the other hand, they considered Thai English accents as easy and clear to understand.

In another study conducted with university students in Vietnam and Japan, Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014, p. 5) found that even though the participants felt the pronunciation of NETs was clearer, more authentic and a desired “model for linguistic output”, they found the pronunciation of NNETs easier in terms of comprehension, respectively.

As illustrated, with regard to the area of correct accent, the results are not so clear-cut as they first might appear e when NETs and NNETs are being compared. Thus, according to some participants, both NETs and NNETs could be efficient as oral teachers, and as far as teaching pronunciation is concerned.

## Research Questions

This research study addressed four main research questions (RQs) that set out to guide the general direction of the research:

RQ I: What are students' preferences regarding levels of *intelligibility* when studying with a particular NET as compared to studying with a particular NNET as far as accent is concerned?

RQ 2: What are students' preferences regarding levels of *comprehensibility* when studying with a particular NET as compared to studying with a particular NNET as far as accent is concerned?

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between the levels of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* and, thus, should they be looked at interchangeably or separately as seen through students' eyes?

RQ 4: What are students' preferences in terms of the desired accent they would like to use in their future communication in English (while still comparing NETs with NNETs)?

## Research Methodology

### *Sample Design*

The subjects for this study were undergraduate university level students at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (HCU), located in Samut Prakarn, Thailand. The students were non-English majors, all of them were Thai. Most of the students had studied English at HCU for at least two to three years prior to the time the research study was conducted. In total, 56 students responded and participated in the study.

### *Measurement and Data Collection Design*

A single type of research instrument was used. This study employed the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part of the questionnaire collected demographic information about the participants (i.e. their first language/nationality; how long they have studied

English at HCU). This information is found in Question № 1-Question № 3.

The second part of the questionnaire asked students to indicate and justify their preferences regarding their perceived levels of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* separately on a 4-point Likert scale (*Strongly Agree*; *Agree*; *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*). Two open-ended questions followed, related to each variable, where students were asked to provide any extra information concerned with two levels/variables in their own words. This information is found in Question № 4-Question № 7.

The third part of the questionnaire asked students to indicate and elaborate on their preferences as to their desired accent in their future communication in English in terms of linguistic output. This information is found in Question № 8-Question № 9. Question № 8 is a closed-ended item, again providing a list of options on a Likert scale, related to various types of accents (*British*; *American*; *Thai*; *Other* and *Neutral*). Question № 9, in contrast, is an open-ended question asking students to justify their preferences in their own words.

### ***Data Analysis Design***

The survey was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of open-ended questions. With regards to the open-ended questions, the findings are categorised and analysed thematically, examining recurring patterns and similarities among students' responses.

In other words, the procedure adopted was a thematic analysis as in grounded theory, whereby categories were being generated from the



statements made by the respondents. According to grounded theory, the researcher constructs analytic codes and categories from the data. Unlike quantitative research methods, where one applies preconceived hypotheses and categories to the data, the researcher creates codes by defining what they see in the data. This provides the researcher with the freedom to define meanings and categories within the data, which later on would help the researcher define relationships, describe actions and events and, lastly, construct a theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

The data was displayed in the form of coded themes, each presented under different sub-sections (sub-headings). Each theme was analysed and rated based upon the number of its frequency among students' answers. These themes have been presented in bold, italics font when providing students' original quotes.

Later, the frequencies of these themes are displayed again quantitatively via percentages, followed by a close, qualitative analysis of each of these themes.

## Findings of the Research Questions

### *a) Findings of RO I*

With regard to RQ I, 41 participants (about 73 %) found the accents of NETs more *intelligible* than the accents of NNETs. 35 participants ticked the category *Agree* and 6 participants ticked the category *Strongly Agree* on the 4-point Likert scale. 11 participants (about 20 %) remained *neutral* as to the issue of *intelligibility*. Only 4 participants (about 7 %) disagreed that

the accents of NETs were more *intelligible* and they all ticked the category *Disagree*.

### ***b) Findings of RO 2***

With regard to RQ 2, 39 participants (about 70 %) found the accents of NETs more *comprehensible* than the accents of NNETs. 33 participants ticked the category *Agree* and 6 participants ticked the category *Strongly Agree* on the 4-point Likert scale. 14 participants (about 20 %) remained *neutral* as to the issue of *comprehensibility*. Only 3 participants (about 7 %) disagreed that the accents of NETs were more *comprehensible* and they all ticked the category *Disagree*.

### ***c) Findings of RO 3***

Concerning the relationship between the levels of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* considering students' preferences, out of those 39-41 participants who respectively found the accents of NETs either more *comprehensible* or more *intelligible* than the accents of NNETs respectively, 32 participants (between about 78 %-82 % out of those) indicated that the accents of NETs were both more *intelligible* and more *comprehensible*. 20 participants of those justified their answers and provided elaborate answers as to the causes of what their preferences were.

The sub-sections represent the themes that emerged among respondents' answers. They have been displayed based upon frequency among students' answers. This method allowed in finding a recurring patterns and consistencies among respondents' answers, which later on was used to analyze the data and the findings further.

Moreover, it should be mentioned here that students' original quotes were mostly cited throughout this study (i.e. as they were given). However, whenever needed, very small corrections were made if, for example, students have made grammatical mistakes or what they had written was somehow unclear and ambiguous. The corrected wording versions are found in brackets within the students' quotes.

## I. Understanding

*Understanding* as a theme was cited most often in support of the accents of NETs. In total, it appeared 16 times and occurred in various forms, such as “*understand*” (cited most often), “*understanding*” and/or “*misunderstanding*”. The category was cited by 11 different participants. It has been coded in italics font.

Below are some examples of the statements made by the respondents in relation to this theme.

- 1) “In my opinion, I think I *understand* the accents of NETs more than the accents of NNETs.” {Participant 4}
- 2) “Some NNETs' English is not clear. It makes me not *understand*.” {Participant 6}
- 3) “It can help people to speak fluently and is easy to *understand*. I think NETs are more *understandable* than NNETs.” {Participant 11}
- 4) “NETs are perspicuous, so this can reduce the *misunderstanding* or *understanding* something as wrong speech. It makes the listener be clear with the word [words] that they speak.” {Participant 13}

## 2. Easiness/Ease

*Easiness* or *ease* occurred as the second most-often cited theme, again given in support of the accents of NETs. It was quoted 14 times and was given in various forms, such as “*easier*”, “*easily*” and/or “*easy*”. This thematic category was quoted by 9 different participants. It has been coded too in italics font.

Below are some examples related to the theme.

- 1) “I like it because I can listen very *easily*. It can be listened to very *easily*, so if you [they] speak out, listeners can understand *easily*.”  
{Participant I8}
- 2) “I think the accents and pronunciation of NETs are *easier* to understand than those of NNETs, because they are the native-they have to pronounce in the right way. The accents/pronunciation of NETs can make listeners understand their sentences *easily*.”  
{Participant I9}
- 3) “Because these are accents that make you sound similar to foreigners...are *easy* to understand.” {Participant I5}

## 3. Clarity

*Clarity* occurred as the third most-often cited theme, again given in support of the accents of NETs. It appeared in various forms, such as “*clear*”, “*clearly*” and/or “*clearer*”. In terms of frequency, it occurred 7 times and it was cited precisely by 7 different respondents. Again, it has been coded in italics font. Below are some examples.

- 1) "Some NNETs' English is not *clear*. It makes me not understand."  
{Participant 6}
- 2) "The accents of NETs are *clearer* than the accents of NNETs."  
{Participant 7}
- 3) "NETs' speaking [way of speaking] is very *clear*. NETs speak very efficiently and have good grammar." {Participant 14}

#### 4. **Comprehensibility**

Next, *comprehensibility* appeared 4 times as a theme and it was quoted by 3 different respondents. It appeared variously as "*comprehend*" and/or "*comprehensible*". This thematic category has been coded too in italics font.

Some of the examples are as follows.

- 1) "Because we have been learning the accents of NETs for many years. Some NNETs still strongly have their mother language accents, which are very hard to *comprehend*. On the other hand, we have been learning the accents of NETs for many years or since young, so it is *easier* for us to *comprehend*." {Participant 8}
- 2) "It's smooth and has more influence. American English is more *comprehensible*." {Participant 9}

#### 5. **Learning**

*Learning* appeared 3 times as a theme and was cited by 2 different respondents. It appeared each time as an action verb form, stemming from the verb root form ("*to learn*"), referring in the text to the practice of learning precisely the accents of NETs. It occurred as "*learning*" and/or "*learn*". Here too, this category has been coded in italics font.

The examples are provided below.

- 1) “Because we have been *learning* the accents of NETs for many years. Some NNETs still strongly have their mother language accents, which are very hard to comprehend. On the other hand, we have been *learning* the accents of NETs for many years or since young, so it is easier for us to comprehend.” {Participant 8}
- 2) “Because they are native. That is good if you *learn* with them, so when you speak, your sound will be like a native accent.” {Participant 12}

## 6. **Intelligibility, Smoothness and Influence**

*Intelligibility* as a theme appeared 2 times given by 2 different respondents, quoted originally as “*intelligible*”. Similarly, *smoothness* and *influence* as categories appeared 2 times each, given by 2 different respondents each time. They were cited originally as “*smooth*” and “*influence*”, respectively. All these thematic categories have been coded in italics font too. The examples are as follows.

- 1) “I think NETs are more *intelligible* than NNETs, because English is their language.” {Participant 3}
- 2) “NETs’ accents and the pronunciation are more *intelligible* than NNETs’ accents and pronunciation.” {Participant 4}
- 3) “It’s *smooth* and has more *influence*. American English is more comprehensible.” {Participant 9}
- 4) “It’s *smooth* and has more *influence*. American English is more comprehensible.” {Participant 10}

#### *d) Findings of RQ 4*

With regard to RQ 4, among all respondents, 49 participants (87.5 %) stated that they would like to mimic and copy NS accents in their future communication in English. 39 participants expressed preference for American English (AE) only, 9 participants expressed preference for British English (BE) only, and 1 participant expressed preferences for both. Out of those 49 participants, 29 participants justified their answers.

Moreover, regarding RQ 4, only 1 participant stated that they would prefer to mimic and copy a NNS accent in their future communication in English, namely Thai English (TE) accent. 4 participants remained *neutral* with regard to their future accent preferences.

As one could observe, there are recurring patterns and consistencies among each of the respondents' answers. Similar to the previous sub-section, participants found NS accents *easier* both in terms of *comprehension* levels and also regarding participants' desire for future communication and use.

*Easiness* or *ease* as a category occurred in each participant's answer here and was given in various forms, such as "*easier*", "*easy to pronounce*", "*easy to speak*", "*easy to understand*", "*easy to listen to*", "*the easiest*" and/or "*easy*" amongst others. Hence, this theme has been presented as a single category even though it appeared variously, such as in the form of whole phrases, word groupings and/or collocations. As earlier, it has been coded in italics font.

*Learning* as a thematic category appeared on the previous sub-section. This appeared twice and cited by two different respondents. Each time in a

whole phrase, referring to the practice of learning a NS accent (BE accent). It occurred and has been identified as: “*have learned it since they were young*”.

The answers given by 12 participants (out of the 29 participants who justified their answers) have been chosen as their answers best illustrated participants’ preferences and provided sufficient support for the analysis.

They were as follows.

- 1) “The American accents are common and popular and *easy to speak*.” {Participant 2}
- 2) “American accents are *easy to pronounce*.” {Participant 4}
- 3) “American accent is *easy to understand* and is so attractive.” {Participant 6}
- 4) “...because American accent is *easier to speak* than English and Thai, and it’s not fixed in grammar too much.” {Participant 9}
- 5) “...I think American accent is *easier* than English or Thai, because they don’t think about grammar too much.” {Participant 10}
- 6) “For my future, I would like to communicate with an American accent. I think this accent is *the easiest* and I can more understand [understand it more/better].” {Participant 11}
- 7) “I think American English is *easy to listen* [to] and it seems professional.” {Participant 13}
- 8) “I think American English is *easy to listen* [to] and understand *easier* [and I understand it *more easily*].” {Participant 14}
- 9) “For me, American accent is a basic accent that I think it’s [the] *easiest to understand*.” {Participant 15}



- 10) "American accents is *more easy* [are *easier*] to *mimic, learn and understand*." {Participant 16}.
- 11) "British accent is *easy to listen* [to]." {Participant 19}
- 12) "...because I think British accent is *easy to understand* and most of the Thai people *have learned it since they was* [were] *young*." {Participant 20}

## Discussion

### Students' preferences regarding levels of *intelligibility* comparing NETs with NNETs

With regard to RQ 1, among all respondents, 41 participants (about 73 %) agreed that they found the accents of NETs more *intelligible* than those of NNETs. These figures strongly suggest that from students' perspectives, NS accents are more *intelligible* than NNS accents. In addition, the results indicate very little preference for NNS accents.

### Students' preferences regarding levels of *comprehensibility* comparing with NETs

In RQ 2, 39 participants (about 70 %) agreed that they found the accents of NETs more *comprehensible* than those of NNETs. As with the case with *intelligibility* the findings strongly suggest that from students' perspectives, NS accents are more *comprehensible* than NNS accents. In addition, the results indicate very little preference for NNS accents.

### Relationship between *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility*

Concerning with the relationship between the levels of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* considering students' preferences, out of 39-41 participants found the accents of NETs either more *comprehensible* or more *intelligible* than the accents of NNETs, 32 participants (between about 78 %-82 % out of those) indicated that the accents of NETs were both more *intelligible* and more *comprehensible*. These findings suggest that there is a certain degree of relationship between both *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* when interpreting foreign speech as interpreted by students. These findings also challenge the current ideologies of WEs, which call for increasing popularity and demand for other non-native varieties of English world-wide, concerning the area of accent varieties too. 20 participants (of those 32 participants) justified their answers and provided elaborate answers as to the reasons for their preferences. Even though the recurring themes appeared in various forms (and parts of speech) considering students' original answers, the findings suggest recurring patterns and consistencies among respondents' answers.

As it was indicated in the previous section, on the one hand, participants found NS accents more *understandable* than NNS accents and this category occurred most often among their answers. On the other hand, participants found NS accents *easier* regarding levels of *comprehension* and this category was the second most frequently quoted and rated by participants. In addition, participants found NS accents more *comprehensible*, more *intelligible*, *smoother* and more *influential* than NNS accents.

The findings suggest that there is a certain degree of relationship between *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* and those two levels in the process of listening comprehension complement each other. In other words, in terms of listening comprehension, pronunciation should not be interpreted as an isolated area alone, but within the context of whether meaning as a whole has been conveyed successfully to the listener. Thus, pronunciation should be analysed on a more macro-level or rather on a sentence level, and interpreted in line with other contextual and situational factors that might be deemed important for the success of the meaning of the communicative act.

The findings also challenge the current ideologies of WEs, which call for increasing popularity and demand for other non-native varieties of English world-wide, concerning the area of accent varieties too. The findings of this study also indicate that Thai student' preferences for NS accents could be due to the fact that students have been exposed to those accents in the educational environment since young age and, therefore, they have been *familiar* with them the most. As is evident from the answers given by two of the participants earlier (Participant 8 and Participant 12-see *Results-c*), as a result of *learning* the accents of NETs, participants thus found them easier to *comprehend* or *understand*. In other words, the issue of *familiarity* could be an important factor in determining students' views and aspirations for their desired accent model(s). It could be argued, therefore, that students' existing levels of *familiarity* with certain accents could influence their perceptions of such accent(s) positively, so they would end up favouring the use of such accents, at least from a listener's point of view or considering the act of listening-comprehension, in particular. Thus, if students consider an

accent *familiar*, they would find it *easy, intelligible, comprehensible* (or *understandable* as whole), as the answers have revealed.

The results go in line with the findings of Kaur and Raman (2014, p. 258), who suggested that *familiarity* with certain accents results in having learners develop more “favourable and positive” attitudes towards those particular accents and, moreover, they regard them as more acceptable, pleasant and correct.

In light of all this, it would be interesting to further investigate whether the preference for an accent from a listener’s or interlocutor’s point of view could also lead to one’s preference for using such an accent in the future as one being the speaker himself or herself, not just the listener. In other words, it would be interesting to find out whether there is a relationship between one’s preference for an accent because of existing levels of *familiarity* and thus *comprehensibility* with it, and subsequently one’s intention to use such an accent in their future communication in English. Indeed, this would be a matter of discussion throughout the following subsection.

### **Students’ preferences in terms of the accent they would like to use in their future communication in English**

As indicated, with regard to RQ 4, among all respondents, 49 participants (87.5 %) stated that they would like to mimic and copy NS accents in their future communication in English. 39 participants (about 70 %) expressed preference for AE only; 9 participants (about 16 %) expressed preference for BE only and 1 participant (about 2 %) expressed preferences for both. Out of those 49 participants, 29 participants justified their answers.

As mentioned, participants found NS accents *easier* both in terms of general *comprehension* levels and also regarding participants' preferences for future communication and use in English. *Easiness* or *ease* as a category occurred in each participant's answer and was given in various forms (phrases, collocations and/or word groupings), such as "*easier*", "*easy to pronounce*", "*easy to speak*", "*easy to understand*", "*easy to listen to*", "*the easiest*" and/or "*easy*" amongst others.

The thematic category has been presented and analyzed as a single category with the idea in mind that it better illustrates the existing cause-and-effect relationship between existing high levels of *familiarity* with an accent and the *easiness* (or *ease*) of such an accent in terms of both *comprehension* levels and future pronunciation use.

In addition, 2 participants (Participant 18 and Participant 20-see *Results-d*) referred to the practice of learning a NS accent (BE accent) and expressed the idea that this accent was *easier* in terms of *comprehension* levels or "*easy to understand*", because Thais "*have learned it since they were young*". It should be noted that this theme also occurred amongst two of the participants' answers who also shared that as a result of *learning* the accents of NETs, they found them easier to *comprehend* or *understand*.

The results therefore suggest that students' preferences for NS accents could be due to the fact that students have learned those accents since young age and, therefore, they have been *familiar* with them the most. As evident especially from the answers given by four of those participants, as a result of learning the accents of NETs, participants thus found them easier to *comprehend* or *understand*, respectively. Kaur and Raman (2014, p. 258),

*familiarity* with certain accents develop students “favourable and positive” attitudes towards a particular accent. Furthermore, Goldsmith and Dennis (2016, p. 51), Saengboon (2015, pp. 151-152) and Kalra and Thanavisuth (2018, p. 281) supported the findings that Thai university students exhibited preferences for NS accents over NNS accents and, therefore, considered NETs as better and more helpful teachers than NNETs particularly in the areas of listening and speaking, and pronunciation. Considering students’ preferences what constitutes an acceptable accent in English, and their desired linguistic model in terms of output or production, this suggests that participant’s linguistic model is still the NSs.

One could, therefore, draw the conclusion that students’ preferences are highly shaped and influenced by their exposure to the language and language learning. Though, there is a certain bias or myth existing in many countries, including Thailand, that the NS model is the one that learners should learn and imitate, especially in terms of pronunciation (Jindapitak, 2014, p. 4983; Jindapitak and Teo, 2013, p. 201).

From a pedagogical point of view, teachers and educational policy-makers thus need to plan, design, adjust and re-adjust their teaching and assessment practices so as to reflect recent and current trends in terms of how the English language evolves in various contexts and parts of the world, especially Thailand.

## **Conclusion**

This research study examined the relationship between students’ levels of *comprehension* of various English accents and their preferences regarding the accents they would like to use in their future communication in English.

This established that from students' perspectives, the accents of NETs/NSs were both more *intelligible* and *comprehensible* than the accents of NNETs/NNSs.

As participants expressed preferences for NS accents as their desired future models of linguistic output, thus, the issue of *familiarity* or *exposure* to particular accents was viewed as crucial in determining preferences of accent and communication models in English. Therefore, preferences are largely a result of the over-prevailing practice of exposing students to NS models the most or guiding them in adhering to those accents the most, both in theory and practice. In other words, students might hold a certain bias towards those accents and their in-built perceptions, therefore, might be socially-constructed to an extent rather than a result of their own convictions and opinions of what constitutes an *acceptable* accent in English, both in terms of input and output.

In this regard, this particular study suggests that students should be informed and exposed to various models and varieties of English, both various NS and NNS models, concerning but not limited to the area of accent only. In addition, educators need to teach and inform students about the constantly evolving nature and status of English, which changes from one context to another. Also, in terms of *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility*, they could be analysed interchangeably and the study of accent perception should be analysed on a broader level and evaluated in light of the success of the overall meaning of the communicative act.

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